

THE REPROACH OF VIRTUE: THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE AND PATHWAY TO PURITY OF LIFE AND LEADERSHIP TRANSFORMATION IN AFRICA

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Citation: Baraburu, G. Y. (2024). The reproach of virtue: the african experience and pathway to purity of life and leadership transformation in Africa. *International Journal of Tourism and Technology (IJTT)*, 2(1), 277-284

Abstract

In human relationship and conversation in the African continent, virtue is one of the most fundamental components in the building and nourishing of African life and governance. Ironically, virtue has been sentenced to “death”, while vice (reproach of virtue) has been resurrected to take centre stage in the production of life experiences, making the continent to descend into avoidable pain, misery, illiteracy, poverty, diseases, death and leadership crises. This discourse is a unique scholarly effort to resurrect the treasures of virtue and set a trajectory of purity of life and leadership transformation in the continent. This work has seven (7) components, with the introduction highlighting the notable challenges and the value of setting a pathway for redemption. The twin concepts of virtue and vice (reproach of virtue) are given conceptual treatment, and a catalogue of the condemnable effects of the reproach of virtue is given a noticeable focus. Underlining the undeniable love of virtue as a mystery in the leadership transformation of Africa, while offering a synopsis of the discourse with noble and essential prescriptions as guardians in the development of Africa.

Keywords: *Virtue, Vice, Transformation, Leadership.*

Introduction

Incidentally, the reproach of virtue is the dramatization of vice and the reproach of vice is the display of virtue. But African leaders and African leadership appear to embrace vice as a virtue and crave its notoriety, in the progressive, exciting and entertaining development and nourishment of life in the African continent regardless of the degree of shape, pattern or quality of living experiences of Africans in their daily transactions of lives in words, speeches, conversations, relationships, conduct, choices, decisions, actions, etc. Interestingly, in the community of thoughts or ideas, virtue is senior and superior to the other ideas in their interactive, intriguing and intertwining interplay to engender beauty and dynamism of quality living experiences in the continent of Africa, but African leadership in their pleasure and luxury of curiosity of vice or state of disdain for honour of virtue have subjected the African community unto avoidable perils or misfortune. It is needful to assert that the destructive rage of the mental attitudes and conduct of Africans, and importantly, African leadership is due to the contestation between virtue and vice for supremacy and dominance in the sacred chambers of the hearts of Africans, but the consequence and disaster is not more to the fierceness of the contest as in the abandonment of virtue.

There are no schools and curricular for vice, but in an ironical twist, vice or dishonour for virtue is developing in an astronomical speed and raising a loud alarm over virtue in the African space, as it were, to compel us to agree with Mikhail Bakunin who wrote in 1917 in Russia to mobilize for the Bolshevik revolution that “in this revolution we will have to

awaken the devil in the people, stir up their basest passions” (Ogan, 2004). African leadership and followership appear to have set aflame their basest passions in the demonstration of outrageous wickedness in leadership on the part of the leaders, and the acceptance of deadly wickedness in leadership by the African populace, which appears as an establishment of a grand conspiracy of the reproach of virtue, and a credit to the honour of vice in the continent. This discourse is a scholarly reengineering of mental reorientation to reposition virtue in the thoughts and sensibilities of Africans on the pathway to development.

Literature Review

Understanding the Concept of Virtue

In the investigations and interpretations of human life, in description or prescription, or by logical conceptualization, virtue depicts different things to different people, depending on the person exercising the luxury of interpretation, percipience and the contextual essence. Explicit and appropriate interpretation of virtue is morality or high moral quality.

Mackie (1990) maintained that:

morality is not to be discovered but to be made: we have to decide what moral views to adopt, what moral stands to take. No doubt the conclusions we reach will reflect and reveal our sense of justice, our moral consciousness – that is our moral consciousness as it is at the end of the discussion, not necessarily as it was at the beginning. But that is not the object of the exercise: the object is rather to decide what to do, what to support and what to condemn, what principles of conduct to accept and foster as guiding or controlling our own choices and perhaps those of other people as well.

Morality in the broad sense would be “a general, all-inclusive theory of conduct: the morality to which someone subscribed would be whatever body of principles he allowed ultimately to guide or determine his choices of action” (Mackie, 1990). Virtue or morality could depict high quality character or excellent character. Virtue or morality means goodness, righteousness, uprightness, incorruptibility, probity, trustworthiness, irreproachability, blamelessness, purity, chastity, etc. The state or quality of being morally good and doing what is right and good, and avoiding what is wrong and bad (The New Webster’s Dictionary, 1997). Virtue is all habitual dispositions to choose and do good in thinking, wishing, desiring, acting and in all ramifications. Virtue is strength of character or excellence of character. “The quality of your character is the measure of your leadership effectiveness ... True leadership cannot be divorced from the basic qualities that produce good sound character” (Munroe, 1993).

In the “Nicomachean ethics”, Aristotle (as cited in Feder, et al, 2004) acknowledges that:

people have many different opinions about what counts as good, but he believes that we can nevertheless gain insight into what human beings generally, perhaps even universally, agree upon as good.

For Aristotle, virtue is the search for the highest good, he recognizes that even the good we may universally count as good are not pursued purely for their own sake, but rather as a means to achieving other goods. For example, most of us desire health not just for the sake of being healthy but so that we can freely pursue activities that we enjoy (Feder et al., 2004). Aristotle is after a good that can be said to be pursued not as a means to some further good, but as an end in itself. He concludes that this highest end is “happiness” but better rendered as “flourishing”. He asserts that “human beings achieve the highest degree of flourishing when engaged in a life of contemplation, but the next highest degree comes with practicing moral virtue” (Feder et al., 2004). Bentham sees the principle of utility or happiness as the sole and

profound basis for morality and legislation and a motivating force in human actions. Morality or law is to command, prohibit or permit some form of conduct. “The prescription of utilitarianism is that,... one should choose that course of action that is likely to lead to the greatest happiness for the greatest number (Azenabor, 2010).

According to Aristotle (as cited in Mukherjee, & Ramaswamy, 2007), happiness is attained by the exercise of two types of virtue, the ethical and the intellectual:

intellectual virtue was the knowledge of final causes, and that included “practical wisdom” (Phronesis) or the knowledge of eternal and unchanging objects... Ethical virtues involved bravery in battle (courage), honesty in business dealings (justice) and generosity towards one’s city and friends, magnificence and liberality”.

Socrates was the first to teach the priority of personal integrity in terms of a person's duty to himself and not to the gods, or the law, or any other authorities. He believes that the pursuit of knowledge and an aspiration to virtue are one and the same thing (as cited in Magee, 2010). Socrates was in effect the founder of moral philosophy and for him virtue is knowledge and knowledge is virtue.

Understanding the Reproach of Virtue

The reproach of virtue is the dishonour of virtue or the discredit of virtue, it is the subscription to honour or credit to vice; a state or quality of habitual dispositions to choose and do evil in thinking, wishing, desiring, acting and in all ramifications. The state of shame or loss of integrity or honour in Africa is a graphic display and pride acceptance of the reproach of virtue. African leaders, African leadership and African followership appear to be in collaboration with the supposition of subjectivity of values or moral subjectivism which could be a first order, normative view, that everyone really ought to do whatever he thinks he should. “This action is right means approval of this action, or more generally that moral judgments are equivalent to reports of the speaker’s own feelings or attitudes” (Mackie, 1990).

Mackie (1990) in presenting Kantian and Post-kantian moral thought declared that:

there are no objective values The claim that values are not objective, are not part of the fabric of the world, is meant to include not only moral goodness, which might be most naturally equated with moral value, but also other things that could be more loosely called moral values or disvalues – rightness and wrongness, duty, obligation, an action’s being rotten or contemptible, and so on. It also includes non-moral values, notably aesthetic ones, beauty and various kinds of artistic merit.

African leadership appears to warmly embrace the notion that values are not objective, that the sense of moral right or wrong is not in the objects themselves but in the understanding; that “subjective agreement would give inter-subjective values, but inter-subjectivity is not objectivity. Nor is objectivity simply universalizability: someone might well be prepared to universalize his prescriptive judgments or approvals (Mackie, 1990).

But African leadership and followership need to understand that non universalizability of judgments or approvals is not enough yardstick for the denial of objectivity of values. Valuing, preferring, choosing, recommending, rejecting, condemning, and so on, are human activities, and should serve the general good of all.

Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (2007) affirmed also that:

for Aristotle the good of a community was clearly the greater, the perfect thing to attain and preserve, than the good of a single individual. This did not

mean that an individual could be made to sacrifice the private for the public. Rather, being poor judges of their own interests, individuals could be educated in virtue to achieve their own happiness and excellence, in congruence with common good.

The common good of all does not justify moral relativism, notwithstanding the celebration of the reproach of virtue and the declaration of immoral moralities (Arthur, 1993), as in the African situation. Living experiences in the African community is a demonstration of the reproach of virtue in both leadership and followership as exemplified in lifestyles.

Consequences of the Reproach of Virtue To African Experiences

Astonishingly, the inevitable and disastrous implications of the reproach of virtue in African experiences as orchestrated by the African leadership in sinister collaborative union with African followership, is as in Rousseau's (as cited in Mukherjee & Ramaswamy, 2007) synopsis of the abusers of virtue that:

these vain and futile disclaimers (the philosophers) go forth on sides, armed with their fatal paradoxes to sap the foundations of our faith and nullify virtue. They smile contemptuously at such old names as patriotism and religion, and consecrate their talents and philosophy to the destruction and defamation of all that men hold sacred.

All that Africans hold sacred by virtue of the reproach of virtue has been assigned to the dustbin of desecration, despoilation and destruction in the daily experiences of life in the African community. Africa is cruelly growing immoral and corruptive with rapidity towards the arena of irredeemability and only the worth and power of virtue can offer a redemption. The loss or lack of honour for virtue in the African space has eroded and degraded the objective validity of the treasures of discipline, diligence, honesty, commitment, tenacity, sacrifice, knowledge and intelligent labour (essential attributes and strength of virtue) compellingly needed for high productivity, especially in food security, accommodation security and other physiological attainments. It is a consequence of the reproach of virtue that African leadership and followership have abandoned any sense of worth and value for physiological needs, and shamelessly embrace the painful and agonizingly debilitating experiences of hunger, starvation, sicknesses, diseases, homelessness, malnutrition, miseries, death, etc, especially in central and west Africa, for even the African populace have refused to revolt against bad leadership.

World Vision International Reports 2023, opined that more than one (1) billion people in Africa struggle to afford a healthy diet. In Sudan 8.6 million people face extreme hunger; Somalia 4.3 million experience acute food insecurity. In Niger 1.9 million, about 82% of the population faces insufficient food. Mortality rate in Africa is estimated at more than two deaths each day for every 10,000 people. Countries across Africa including Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, Niger, etc, are facing alarming worst food crisis because African leadership has failed to engineer the love of virtue that is a catalyst to productivity. Regrettably, social capital in African communities is shockingly growing devoid of integrity of friendship, brotherhood, neighbourliness, oneness, love, unity, tolerance and overall social harmony, importantly in reckless financial malevolence or misbehaviour that celebrates money at the expense of life and social harmony. The love for money with its sense of insatiable crave for possession has eroded the worth and value of life, making Africans to idolize money and unconsciously institute the culture of worshipping the idol of mammon, and making corruption a way of life. Profiteering is dangerous and contagious as the evil of murder, a deadly epidemic that is one of the greatest injury to the soul of Africa. Profiteering eliminates the

consciousness of love for fellow Africans and social harmony which is not only pervasive but dangerous and destructive to life experiences in the continent. Corruption Perception Index (CPI) Global ranking of 180 countries from zero to 100 in the public sector in 2023 showed that Somalia is CPI: 11, Global ranking is 180th, South Sudan is CPI: 13, Global ranking is 177th; Equatorial Guinea is CPI: 17, Global ranking 172nd; Libya is CPI: 18, Global rank 170th. Francois Valerian, chair of Transparency International, said, “corruption will continue to thrive until justice systems can punish wrongdoing and keep government in check... leaders should fully invest in and guarantee the independence of institutions that hold the law and tackle corruption. It is time to end impunity for corruption”. Reproachment of virtue is corruption of mental life and corruption of behaviour, conduct and general corruptive life experiences which are commonplace in the African space. The strength and force of the mental life of African leaders is not only little but very weak on social capital needs. Infact, there is disdain for social capital values or incorruptibility by African leaders.

The rapid growing rate and effects of crime, perverted social behaviour, insecurity and instability in the continent of African is traceable to abuse of virtue which actuates decadence of mental sensibilities, perversion of social tendencies, criminality and instability in lifestyles among Africans including the leadership top brass. Criminality appears to enjoy some warmly tacit approval by conscious or unconscious encouragement by African leaders and in the abysmal failure of governmental institutions, especially the judicial systems to curb the menace due to the corruptive influence of money in Africa.

Allen (2010) averred that:

It is not sufficient to deny or ignore evil. It must be understood. It is not enough to pray to God to remove the evil; you must find out why it is there, and what lesson it had for you. It is of no avail to fret and fume and chafe at the chains which bind you; you must know why and how you are bound All evil is corrective and remedial, and is therefore not permanent. It is rooted in ignorance, ignorance of the true nature and relation of things and so long as we remain in that state of ignorance, we remain subject to evil.

African Organized Crime Index Ranking 2023, showed that Democratic Republic of Congo is 7.35; Nigeria 7.28; South Africa 7.18; Kenya 7.02; Libya 6.93; Central African Republic 6.75; Sudan 6.37; South Sudan 6.32; Uganda 6.55; Tanzania 6.20; Somalia 6.13; Cameroon 6.27; Mozambique 6.20; etc. Many African countries like Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Niger, South Africa, Central African Republic, Liberia, South Sudan, among others, encounter security challenges like Islamic militancy by groups like Al Shabaab and Boko Haram; social-political instability, xenophobic attacks, kidnapping, ritual killings, banditry, maritime piracy, human trafficking, drug trafficking, gender-based violence, cybercrimes, terrorism, insurgencies, etc. These shockingly intriguing complexities and intricate challenges in the African communities are consequences of the reproachment of virtue and causing a tempestuous continent, for the luxury of virtue engenders purity of hearts and lifestyles. Africa is the continent of leadership crises and misfortune because there is no virtue in leadership development. African leadership is a testimonial of the reproachment of virtue or disdain for virtue. Lack of solid moral foundation and uncontrollable appetite for ignorance of the flourishing mysteries of leadership transformation has diseased the mental life of African leaders and conditioned them into mockery of democracy, coup d'états, sit-tight syndrome, embezzlement of public funds, senseless and cruel acquisition of public wealth and prosperities, arrogance and abuse of power, corruption of institutions of government, extravagant ostentatious lifestyles of leaders, family members and their cronies; celebration of corruption and corrupt leaders among others. Public speeches

in Nigeria and in most African countries are in most cases corruptive and deceitful speeches because the integrity of the character content of the public officials authoring them are in most cases in sharp opposition to the real life dispositions of their practical official conduct, which implies that the delivery of the public speeches is a hoax to hoodwink the public due to their poverty of virtue. Nigeria is experimenting democracy every day. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo has ruled Equatorial Guinea for 43 years; Paul Biya has ruled Cameroon for 40 years; Dennis Sassou Nguesso has ruled the Republic of Congo for 38 years; Yoweri Museveni has ruled Uganda for 36 years; I said as Atwerk has ruled Eritrea for 29 years; among others. Malevolence of leadership is a consequence of abuse of moral rectitude as exemplify by African leaders in their abandonment of the building and promotion of peace, joy, goodness and happiness which are attributes among others of the wealth of virtue. Transformation and happiness are mandatory products of virtue and no other way.

Love of Virtue As A Catalyst for African Transformation

In the kingdom of ends, the dignity of virtue is superior to the value of price, because it is exalted above all price and so admits of no equivalent. The intrinsic importance of virtue is the dignity of glory.

In the interpretations of Immanuel Kant (as cited in Feder, et al, 2004), averred that:

now morality is the only condition under which a rational being can be an end in himself; for only through this is it possible to be a law-making member in a kingdom of ends..., for their worth consist, not in the effects which result from them, not in the advantage or profit they produce, but in the attitudes of mind.... This assessment reveals as dignity the value of such a mental attitude and puts it infinitely above all price, with which it cannot be brought into reckoning or comparison without, as it were, a profanation of its sanctity.

Virtue is its own reward – meaning the reward for acting in a moral or correct way is the knowledge, satisfaction and peace that you have done, and you should not expect more than this, for example, praise from other people or payment. African families, societies and states must grow virtuous institutions to actuate quality choices and actions that produce abounding goodness and happiness in individuals and in the public space. Africa must raise up a new breed of leaders that would be heroes of the future by the refining furnace of virtue. Without good leadership in our world, the future is filled with danger. Good leaders are men and women of deep knowledge and understanding that command great and transformative decisions and actions. With good leadership, the future will be filled with the greatest opportunities man has ever known (Newman, 1997). Only virtue can purify human frailties in both the individual and public space and guarantee peace and happiness in the pursuit for African excellence. This is against the backdrop that even the African laws and regulations set by African leadership to curtail and regulate African frailties occasion by the hot pursuit for worldly goods and standards have not been able to guarantee individual and public peace and happiness in the continent. The glory of virtue is the mystery and power of transformation.

African leaders must acknowledge, cultivate and promote virtue in their mental attitudes and further make it an edible commodity for consumption by Africans in order for this priceless treasure to flourish and empower the mental fabric of Africans and actuates excellence in their living experiences.

Conclusion

Interestingly, the phenomenology of virtue is the mystery intrinsic in Africans to actuates discoverable, cultivable and transformative power in the mental attitudes and living

experiences of the African populace and governmental jurisdictions in the African continent through the definition and demonstration of a new and quality species of Africans that are prone to excellent affinities in lifestyles. The wages of virtue is the greatest moral and intellectual investment incumbent on Africa to harvest purity of lives, the blogosphere and leadership transformation which will solve a wide-range of problems and challenges in the African continent. This discourse unveils the subjectivity of the consequences of reproach of virtue on behaviour and leadership deficiencies in the continent of Africa, and promotes the compelling need to honour virtue for the unique and prompt accessibility of behavioural and leadership glory in the African space. The prosperity of virtue is the prosperity of Africa and the glory of transformation of Africa, which redound in Africans in thoughts, choices, decisions, conduct, emotions, attitudes, actions, and general lifestyles in excellence. This work is a promotion of the liquidation of the features of the dregs of Africa to erase the ugly characterization of the continent, and forward a glorious destiny before the global community.

Recommendations

1. Governments of the various countries in Africa must declare and fight vice or corruption as an enemy of the people and enemy of the prosperity of the continent of Africa.
2. There must be a practical institutionalization of the hatred or disdain for evil or corruption in both informal and formal training institutions in order to engender purity of mental re-orientation in Africa.
3. The luxury and dignity of virtue must be cultivated, nurtured, and promoted in all informal training institutions in order to build and sustain the treasure of virtue in mental attitudes and general objective consciousness of Africans.
4. All governmental institutions across the length and breadth of Africa must promote and demonstrate the glory of virtue in all officialdom by formalization and standardization in legal security.
5. Institution of the investiture of honour or hall of fame for hub of virtue and sons of virtue for national honours awards in the various countries in Africa and making it a continental actualization or fulfillment attainment.
6. To conscientize Africans with the knowledge of God and the practical demonstration of the values of righteousness in our daily living meditations and conditions.
7. To institute honest and fiercely incorruptible institutions to deal decisively with culprits or offenders of virtue in order to maintain and protect the security of virtue in the continent of Africa.

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